

TASK-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING : IMPROVING INTEGRATED LANGUAGE SKILLS

Nur Akhlis¹

A. Background

Teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia is undertaken at secondary school as a compulsory subject. Basically, its implementation at present is based on the standards of content which has the students reach a functional level. It means that the students are expected to be able to communicate with the language orally and in a written form to overcome their daily problems.² In other words, the goal of the teaching of English is to enable the students to possess the ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Further, the current 2006 Curriculum known as KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, Curriculum at School Levels) is developed from the 2004 Curriculum and aims to develop learners' language competence as manifested by the four language skills. The curriculum suggests that the teaching-learning process should be learner-centered, provide experiential learning, develop learners' creativity and create enjoyable and challenging conditions.³ Teachers in each school are required to develop the curriculum by referring to the standards of content and standards of graduates' competencies set up by Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan. Within this curriculum, Triprihatmini argued that teachers are given more space to develop the curriculum into syllabuses and to implement them in classroom practice to assist and facilitate learners to develop and deploy their language skills for communication.⁴

In fact, the English instruction in some secondary schools does not demonstrate a satisfactory result. Many students fail to reach the goal of the English teaching. They are not able to communicate with the language either orally or in written form although they have learned English for many years. We cannot deny the fact that this failure is caused by many problems during the instructional process such as, lack of ability in communication, limited vocabulary, being afraid to mistakes and unconfident. However, the most

¹Dosen tetap pada Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris STAIN Kediri.

²Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, *Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi* (Jakarta : Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003), 12.

³Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, *Kurikulum 2004, Standar Kompetensi* (Jakarta : Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2003), 7.

⁴V. Triprihatmini, *Task-Based Language Teaching in Indonesian Context : A Study of English Teachers' Perception of TBLT in Yogyakarta* (Bali : TEFLIN Bali, Number 089, 2008), 21.

important thing is that we, as the English teachers who are directly involved with the instructional activities, must try to look for the best solution to overcome the problems in order to reach the target of the teaching of English.

Due to the importance of teaching English in Indonesia, there should be several developments in the way of the teachers present the materials. The teachers should attempt to encourage the students to use language communicatively. Brown recommended that the teacher has a role as facilitator who offers guidance to the students in creating interesting and motivating lesson. Therefore, the teachers must be creative in selecting and preparing instructional materials, activities and media to make the teaching learning process more interesting and motivating. Then, one of the teacher's efforts to increase the quality of students' English proficiency is by having kind of methods in teaching English.⁵

In line with this view, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) approach could offer the widespread use in the field of EFL teaching in Indonesian secondary schools. According to Triprihatmini, the TBLT, which supports the use of tasks to activate learners' acquisition processes and to promote target language use, is a particular realization of communicative language teaching.⁶ Teachers can design communicative tasks to promote learners' actual language use. Thus, TBLT is an approach that has the potential to be implemented in the EFL classroom in Indonesia.

Based on the theories that are going to be discussed in this article, the writer suggests that teachers can develop not only one students' language skills but also all language skills such as their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills trough teaching based on task-based.

B. Defining Tasks

There are several definitions about "task" in this area. Ellis defines a "task" is a work plan which requires learners to employ cognitive processes and can involve any of the four language skills. Richard and Renandya define a "task" is an activity which learners carry out using their available language resources and leading to a real outcome. In addition, a "task" is learners' work which undertaken using knowledge of language and the result is real action.

Willis comes up with a more limiting definition of task as an activity where the

⁵HD. Brown, *Teaching by Principle : An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (New York : Longman, 2001), 57.

⁶V. Triprihatmini, *Task-Based Language Teaching in Indonesian Context*, 27.

target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.⁷ The target language use in a communicative task is considered as that which brings about an outcome through the exchange of meanings.

Reviewing a number of writers' definitions of "task", Nunan states that when tasks are transformed from the real world to the classroom practice, they become pedagogical in nature.⁸ Therefore, from a pedagogical perspective, Nunan defines task as follows a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle and end.⁹

Collecting many definitions of "task" and relating them to the topic of this study, a task is defined as an activity that provides learners with opportunities to interact and use the target language in any or all of the four language skills in oral and or written language learning and reflects real-world language use with a clearly defined outcome and primary focus on meaning.

C. Components and Sample of Task

A task consists of several components. Nunan proposes six components of a task, namely goals, input, activities, teacher role, learner role and settings.¹⁰ Goals are described as what is intended to be achieved through a learning task. They are not necessarily stated explicitly since they can be inferred from the task. Clark proposes four goal types. They are (1) communicative goals, which refer to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationship through which exchange of information, ideas, opinions, attitudes and feelings occurs, or things can be done (2) socio-cultural goals, namely an understanding of daily life patterns of the target language community (3) learning-how to-learn goals, which are an ability to plan work and find ways to attain its objective (4) language and cultural awareness goals, i.e. an understanding of the system of the target language and how it works.

Input refers to the data, such as picture stories, photographs, drawings, shopping

⁷Jane Willis, *A Framework for Task-Based Learning* (Harlow : Longman, 1996), 23.

⁸D. Nunan, *Task-Based Language Teaching* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

⁹Ibid, 4. Baca D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10.

¹⁰D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, 47-95.

lists, brochures, street map, recipe, newspaper extracts, editorials or postcards, which are used as the point of departure for doing the task.

Activities are what learners will do with the input. Nunan proposes three characteristics of task activities, namely, rehearsal for the real world, skill use and fluency or accuracy.¹¹ The types of activity could be jig-saw, information gap, problem solving, decision making and opinion ex-change.

Teacher role and learner role specify the parts which teacher and learner will play respectively. In using tasks, a teacher is expected to assume two roles.¹² The first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The learner role in task-based language teaching is learner-centered. It makes learners sensitize to their own learning processes because learners can make choices about what to do and how to do. By using “task” as a basic unit of learning and by incorporating a focus on strategies can make learners have the possibility of planning and monitoring their own learning and begin to break down some of the traditional hierarchies.

Settings are the classroom arrangements specified for a task. Task activities can be carried out partly or wholly in the classroom or outside the classroom. They may involve whole class, small groups, pairs or individuals.

These six components are an elaboration of Nunan's four core components of a task, namely, the goals, the input (linguistic or otherwise), the activities derived from this input and finally the roles implied for teacher and learners.¹³

D. TBLT Approach for TEFL in Indonesia

As discussed above, TBLT is trend in Communicative Language Teaching. It is characterized by the use of tasks in teaching and learning process. TBLT integrates meaning focused and form-focused instructions and it is an effective approach for increasing student interactions, it may be importance considering for its application in primary and secondary schools in Indonesia. Fachrurrazy stated that as a new approach for teachers in Indonesia, there are some recommendations relating to the current syllabus and

¹¹Ibid, 59.

¹²MP. Breen and CN. Candlin, “The Essentials of a Communicative Curriculum in Language Teaching.” *Journal Applied Linguistics* 1(2), 1980, 99.

¹³D. Nunan, *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, 47.

textbooks, demand of evaluation system, teacher's belief and use of the target language.¹⁴

Firstly, the current syllabus (i.e. the 1994 English syllabus) and the available textbooks have not been designed using the task-based approach. However, since the task-based approach is concerned with teaching and learning activities, with a little creativity, teachers can modify their lesson preparations to adopt the task-based approach.

Secondly, the application of task-based approach will face a problem with the demand of the evaluation system. Since the importance of the assessment using task-based approach is on what the students do rather than on what they say, it does not match with the demand of the current evaluation system which is focused on language accuracy. For the time being, teachers are advised to apply the approach gradually, and combine it with the teaching and learning activities based on the demand of the evaluation system.

Thirdly, the EFL teachers in Indonesia may have their own belief for their teaching practices. They have developed their way of teaching communicatively. They have change the 'old way' in the form of their perception that they are "not teaching" if they do not teach grammar in their traditional ways (e.g. grammar explanation and mechanical drills). In the long run, approaches, methods and techniques for TEFL develop, and teachers need to develop and keep up with teaching-learning developments.

Fourthly, for the use of the target language, two things need to be considered. On the one hand, there is a challenge for teachers to improve their mastery of English to meet the demand of the use of the target language in teaching. On the other hand, beginning EFL learners may encounter difficulties when the teacher uses English only (the target language) in the classroom. To overcome the learners' difficulties due to their limited language mastery, Prabhu suggests that other communicative resources such as guessing, gestures, native language or actions be used.¹⁵ The use of native language in a foreign language situation may be an option. It may be used when there are certain distinct advantages for students' comprehension and class management. Native language may be used only for short stretches of time. Examples of such advantages include :

- negotiation of disciplinary and other management factors
- brief descriptions of how to carry out a technique
- brief explanations of grammar points

¹⁴Fachrurrazy, "Task-based Activities in TEFL," *Journal TEFLIN*, 11 (1), (<http://journal.teflin.org>, accessed 25 June 2012).

¹⁵Prabhu, "Procedural Syllabuses," in Read, J.A.S. (ed.), *Trends in Language Syllabus Design*, Anthology Series 13:272-280 (Singapore : Singapore University Press for SEAMEO-RELC, 1984), 278-279.

- quick pointers on meanings of words that remain confusing after students have had a try at defining something themselves
- cultural notes and comments.¹⁶

E. Integrated Language Skills Through TBLT Approach

The development of the language skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing, can be integrated into the teaching through TBLT approach. In order to integrate the language skills in ESL/EFL instruction, teachers should consider taking these steps :

1. Learn more about the various ways to integrate language skills in the classroom (e.g., content-based, task-based or a combination).
2. Reflect on their current approach and evaluate the extent to which the skills are integrated.
3. Choose instructional materials, text books and technologies that promote the integration of listening, reading, speaking and writing, as well as the associated skills of syntax, vocabulary and so on.
4. Even if a given course is labeled according to just one skill, remember that it is possible to integrate the other language skills through appropriate tasks.
5. Teach language learning strategies and emphasize that a given strategy can often enhance performance in multiple skills.

In task-based instruction, students participate in communicative tasks in English. A model for Task-Based Learning was outlined by Jane Willis and refers to three stages : the pre-task, the task cycle and language focus.¹⁷ In the pre-task stage, the topic is defined and essential vocabulary is highlighted by the teacher. In the task cycle, learners perform the task in pairs or small groups, rehearse their reports before presenting findings in front of the audience. The final stage is the language focus, during which specific language features that learners encountered in the task are examined and analyzed. Some practice of language features and feedback on students' performance are appropriate at this stage.

The task that focuses in this study is a pedagogical task. According to Long & Crookes, pedagogic tasks are activities which are conducted by teachers and students in the classroom.¹⁸ Based on Fachrurrazy, there are five task types which could be used,

¹⁶Brown, *Teaching by Principles*, 105.

¹⁷Jane Willis, *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, 22-25.

¹⁸M.H. Long and G. Crookes, "Three Approaches to Task-based Syllabus Design," *TESOL Quarterly*, 26 (1) 1992, 27-56.

namely : jigsaw, information gap, problem-solving, making-decision and opinion exchange.¹⁹ Jigsaw tasks are characterized by activities of exchanging and manipulating different information possessed by different participants. In information gap tasks, one participant possesses information which other participants need to complete their tasks. Problem-solving tasks are interaction activities which are oriented toward one resolution of outcome. Decision-making tasks refer to participants' activities in selecting one out of a number of available outcomes. Finally, opinion exchange tasks require participants to engage in discussion and exchange of ideas.

According to Hadi, if students are actively interacting with the tasks, they will make prior knowledge elaboration.²⁰ They will gear these elaborations toward specific purposes. Thus encouraging students to think about what already know, giving them a purpose and getting them actively involved in the tasks will be useful for encouraging prior-knowledge elaborations. Pre-task and task-cycle activities will lead to prior-knowledge elaborations. These activities can also be used to stimulate conversation and discussion and encourage the students to practice listening and speaking skills.

As with the listening and speaking skills, the reading and writing component should be an integrated part of the teaching program and should reflect the interests and needs of the students. Rather than teach writing exercises and grammar drills in isolation, the teacher should assign written work that reinforces what the students have already heard, spoken and read. The steps suggested in the teaching model include written work to support the spoken word. The writing that the students do should be taught in a meaningful context rather than in isolation.

To integrate reading and writing, study guides, hierarchical summary procedure, construct procedures and mapping strategies can be applied. At the end of the lesson, students are asked to make a conclusion and write the summary of the topic discussed. The lesson plan must include various activities designed to assist the teacher in developing students' English language skills as well as increasing their understanding of content knowledge. Students will study the familiar tasks, complete tasks both individually and in pairs or groups and participate in activities that develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Thus these strategies must be taken into account in the integrated language skills instruction.

¹⁹Fachrurrazy, "Task-based Activities in TEFL," *Journal TEFLIN*, 11.

²⁰L.S. Hadi, *Developing Integrated Language Skills Through the Teaching of Reading Comprehension in Content Area* (Bandung : University of Islam, 2010), 75.

E. Conclusion and Suggestions

From the above discussion it can be concluded that the integrated language skills including speaking, listening, reading and writing, can simultaneously be developed through TBLT approach. The task-based approach implies the use of the principle of student-active learning approach and an emphasis on inter-action in learning a language.

In consequence of the adoption of student-active learning approach in secondary school curriculum in Indonesia, teachers should think of the benefit for their students and not merely of their comfort in teaching practices. Thus, the integrated skills activities must be planned in such a way that all language skills are displayed in the classroom tasks and activities.

Using task-based activities at the primary school level, the class situation changed. The students could be enthusiastic in doing the activities. They likely became noisy because they shout or yell when they succeed in doing a task or when they give support to their friends who are doing certain tasks. In addition, the involvements of physical activities cause the students not to sit still in their seats. They often stand or move around. Students' noise and movement should be tolerated because these were the ways to let students interact as suggested in language learning process using tasks.

With this in view, the writer suggests that any teacher who intends to apply the integrated language skills activities through TBLT should :

- be able to select the materials which the students have been familiar with so they have owned prior knowledge about the topic;
- be able to make questions that can develop the four language skills;
- possess not only language knowledge but also content knowledge; and
- have teaching competences.*

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